

A Demon with Ruby Eyes

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This essay takes a longitudinal look at how different communities dealt with political and theological difference in the same space. It examines accounts of Uch Sharif, in contemporary Pakistan, from the thirteenth century to the present. It specifically traces a motif of 'ruby eyes' in Arabic and Persian historiography in an effort to delineate how difference was represented and assimilated. It argues that until the late colonial period, religious difference was mutually comprehensible, even if incommensurate. The rupture of meaning in recognising difference continued in different ways in the post-colonial state of Pakistan. The study provides a methodological argument for reshaping the ways in which we look at landscape, built environment and community, in contemporary South Asia. By situating the textual production of the past alongside the material remnants of the past, this essay reads simultaneously ethnographic and textual understandings of difference in Uch Sharif.

The geographical part of History is stronger than the historical part of geography. Unable to find my place on earth, I tried to find it in History. And History cannot be reduced to a compensation for a lost geography.

(Mahmoud Darwish)¹

Prologue

In the history of Muslim conquests of the world, compiled by Ahmad bin Yahyā b. Jābir bin Dāwūd al-Balādhurī (d. 892), there is an account of

¹ Darwish, 'I Discovered That the Earth Was Fragile and the Sea Light': 81–83.

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the conquest of Kabul and Sistān in the late seventh century. It is thought that al-Balādhurī was of Persian descent and travelled extensively in Iran and Khurasān to collect accounts. He was employed, as a translator, in the courts of ‘Abbasid caliphs al-Wāthiq (d. 847) and al-Mutawakkil (d. 861). He is the author of two of the greatest surviving works in early Arab historiography, the *Ansāb al-Ashraf* (Genealogy of Nobles) and the *Kitāb Futūh al-Buldān* (Book of Conquest of Lands). An idol with ruby eyes first makes an appearance in his Book of Conquest of Lands—marking a frontier and recognition of difference. Al-Balādhurī narrates in his description of the taking of the region of al-Dāwar:

Then Ibn-‘Amir appointed as governor of Sijistan Abd al-Rahmān bin Samrah bin Habīb bin ‘Abd Shams. He went to Zaranj and laid siege to the castle on their day of festival. They made peace with him for 2,000,000 dirham and 1,000 slaves (*wasīf*). Ibn-Samrah conquered everything between Zaranj and Kish and over al-Hind and conquered the area of region of the road of al-Rukhaj which connects it to the land of al-Dāwar.

When he reached the land of al-Dāwar, he surrounded them in the mountain of al-Zur. They appealed for peace. He had with him 8,000 Muslims and each of them received 4,000 dirhams. Ibn-Samrah entered the al-Zur and he saw an idol (*sanām*) of gold (*zahab*) with ruby eyes (*‘ainah yaqutān*). He cut off the head of the idol and took out the rubies. Then he called out to the care-taker (*murzabān*): keep the gold and the rubies. I only wanted to show that it has no power to help nor harm. He then conquered Bust and Zabul by covenant.²

Al-Balādhurī does not dwell on this description but future histories of Islam at the frontier, seeking to describe difference, often see ruby eyes.

This essay recasts religious difference in medieval South Asia as mutually comprehensible incommensurability. There are two specific aims of this essay: the first is to remind us that at the root of the difference *problematic* lies racial difference enacted universally by the colonial regimes; the second is to recover, from colonial and post-colonial historiography, a medieval ground for understanding religious difference. This essay is neither comprehensive nor anecdotal in its treatment of a vast corpus of textual and material production of such difference. Instead, it is geographic: it examines a specific geography and, from that vantage point, articulates how difference is made (and unmade) in the material

² al-Balādhurī, *Futūh al-Buldān*: 382.

landscape of a community. The specific locale is Uch Sharif—currently in the province of Punjab, but historically part of the Sind region—in Pakistan. The essay is divided into three parts: the first section begins with tracing the contemporary echoes of religious difference in the sacral and built environment of Uch Sharif, the second section traces the material and narrative productions in Uch Sharif to early modern and medieval accounts from Uch Sharif, in order to provide an understanding of religious difference rooted in space and time, and finally, the last section moves through the British colonial period to examine how religious difference congealed in political speech and created invisible material and narrative pasts in Uch Sharif. My intention in highlighting the multiple temporalities that coexist in space and text is to present a methodological argument for the historian to look around, and to look around again, rather than to look exclusively forward or back. It is imperative for the historian to recognise unassimilated materialities as well as homogenised narratives to probe their seams and trace their genealogies. The material realities of the present, the object-presences in medieval texts and the colonial constructions of power-relations overlap one another to create visible and invisible spaces in our understanding and in our political being. A simultaneous reading of these overlapping pasts causes us to rethink the basic question: ‘What is religious difference in medieval South Asia?’³

I

At present, Uch Sharif (*uch* means rising; *sharif* sacred or holy) is a town located in the southern part of the Punjab region in Pakistan. Located approximately 70 miles from the ancient city of Multan and near the confluence of the Chanab and Sutlej Rivers, it is also an ancient settlement which served as a major crossroads for mercantile and sacral traffic from the Indus River. In the absence of current certifiable data, it can now best be described as a small town with very little amenities—only one arterial road connects it to the major national highway. Part of the town, which rests at a slightly higher elevation, can be considered a boundaryless

³ I am drawing here on the work of Reinhart Koselleck who argued for a readings varied pasts, their presents and the imagined futures contemporaneously. For Koselleck, die Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen (the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous) was key to an understanding of historical awareness of multiple pasts, see Koselleck, *Futures Past*: 95; ‘Einleitung’: 9–16.

space between the living and the dead: graves from centuries past rest upon ancient ruins, both of which rest under the paved roads of present times (see Figure 1).

In Uch Sharif, I was repeatedly told that the city was founded by Alexander the Great during his Indian campaign. Officials in the East India Company, and later the British Dominion, made numerous attempts to determine whether Uch Sharif was indeed the ‘Alexandria of India’⁵. The local histories speak of a connection with cities mentioned in the Rig Vedās and link the city to the Indus Valley civilisation.⁶ Putting aside the mythical origins, accounts of Uch Sharif abound in geographies,

Figure 1
A View from South of the Plateau, Uch Sharif



Source: Photograph taken by author, 10 March 2011.⁴

⁴ A view from the south of the plateau—photograph taken by author, 10 March 2011. All subsequent photographs taken by author during 10–13th March 2011.

⁵ See McMurdo, ‘Dissertation on the River Indus’: 20–44; Burnes, ‘On Sind’: 11–20; Haig, ‘Ibn Batuta in Sindh’: 393–412.

⁶ See Gauri, *Uch Scharif*; Shahab, *Uch Sharif*; *Kitha-e Pāk*.

hagiographies and histories from the eighth century onwards. The Sind region, conquered in 712 CE by Muhammad bin Qasim, saw a series of Arab principalities (some in allegiance to the ‘Abbasid caliph in Baghdad and some to the Fatimid caliph in Cairo) emerge over the next five hundred years—until the establishment of Delhi Sultanate in 1226. A series of geographers in the employ of the ‘Abbasid state visited or wrote about Sind (*bilād al-Sind*) and mentioned Uch Sharif, including geographers Ibn Khurdādhbih (d. 913), al-Ma’sūdī (d. 957) and al-Istakhrī (d. 951). These visitors to Uch remarked that the region was now under the control of Ismā’ilī Shi’a polity, who was aligned with the Fatimid rulers in Cairo against the ‘Abbasids in Baghdad.

During this period, Uch and Multan remained a central pilgrimage site for Vishnavite and Surya devotees, and their admixture with Isma’īlism created the Satpanth tradition.⁷ Hence, the beginning of the eleventh century witnessed a sacral and political diversity in Uch that was both unique and precarious. Unique, in that the sacral pilgrimage routes which connected the geography of the *Vedās* and Mahabharata and Ramayana intersected with routes linking Shi’a and Sunni polities—both messianic and military. It was to fight this ‘menace’ that Mahmud Ghaznavi attacked Multan in 1010, destroyed the Ismā’ilī rule and eliminated the sources of sacrality linking Uch Sharif to Gujarat and Rajasthan.

From the middle of thirteenth century onwards, Uch Sharif emerged as a node in the Sufi network of mobility connecting Iraq, Iran and India. The Suhrawardi (founded by Shaykh Najib al-Din Suhrawardi, d. 1149) and the Qadiriya (founded by Shaykh Abd ul-Qadir Jilani, d. 1165) Sufi lineages were the most predominant. Their descendants—genealogical and mystic—settled in Uch Sharif and left behind shrines which dot the landscape of the city, making Uch Sharif a centre for mystic and mythic Islam since the middle of fourteenth century.

The landscape of Uch Sharif surrounding the Sufi shrines evokes a sacral geography with its own peaks and valleys—orienting the visitor and the inhabitant to the hierarchy of the shrines and the order of their presence in the pilgrimage route. Upon my arrival in Uch Sharif in March 2011, Wajid Bukhari, a native of Uch Sharif, informed me in which order I should visit the shrines. Mr. Bukhari reproduced what he perceived to be the proper (according to sacrality and seniority) order of Uch Sharif’s sacral sites. He gave me a numbered list including Makhdum Syed Jalal

⁷ See Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis*.

al-Din Surkh Posh (d. 1291), Jamal al-Din Khanda Ro (d. 1290s), Syed Ahmad Kabir Suhrawardi (d. 1324), Makhdum Jahanian Jahan Gasht (d. 1384), Bibi Jawandi (c. 1494) and many others. Providing such lists of sacral sites and objects in Uch Sharif is an established practice, with many commercial enterprises creating DVDs of the pilgrimage route (see Figure 2).

The commercial list features a mixture of the archaeological sites with sacral objects dating back to the Prophet Muhammad and his grandson Imam Hussain. That both Shi'a and Sunni objects are listed on a commercial sign, illustrates that the boundaries between these sects are porous in Uch Sharif, reflecting the long history of coexistence and recognition of difference.⁸ Such recognition—of history, materiality

Figure 2

A Billboard Advertising Video Footage of Sacral Sites, Uch Sharif



Source: Author.

⁸ This is in marked contrast to Karachi and Quetta—two major cities south of Uch Sharif, where the massacres of Shi'a communities are being carried out in a systematic manner and with genocidal intent. See Human Rights Watch Report on Pakistan for 2013: <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/pakistan>.

and practice—has some narrative limits in Uch Sharif. In the many contemporary Muslim accounts of its past, there was never any presence of the non-Muslim population, whose temples and routes also constituted this same geography.

I began to look for traces of this particular past, hoping to find an indication to the amnesia which rendered the Hindu history of Uch Sharif invisible. In a city of graves, I thought best to commence with the graves themselves. The first grave I encountered was right outside the central shrine of Makhdoom Jahanian Jahan Gasht. It belonged to Rana Rai Tulsi Das, a local noble who converted to Islam due to the efforts of the Sufi shaykh, who was buried near him (see Figure 3).

There were no flowers on his grave; nor were there any devotees praying next to it. However, it was marked, next to the shrine and very visible. I asked a number of people if any stories were connected to the grave, but no one knew any. They did recognise the person as having been important. However, ‘This happened many hundreds of years ago—but, now we do

Figure 3

The Grave of Rana Rai Tulsi Das, Uch Sharif



Source: Author.

not have Hindus here because by the *barakat* of the Sufi shaykh this whole region converted to Islam,' my guide informed me.⁹ The hagiographies of these Sufis abound with tales of '*kathir tadād mein ghair Muslim halqa багаosh-e-Islam huway*' (in mass numbers, non-Muslims entered Islam).¹⁰ The Sufi master attributes 'mass conversion' to a very 'public' display of his miraculous powers (*karamāt*).¹¹ The presence of this medieval notation of politically important conversion is painted on the grave—'Rana Rai Tulsi Das—Islamic name...'—as the Rana and the Rai denote clan and political leadership of this particular person in Uch Sharif. His grave is then a viable indication of the mass conversion thesis—after this conversion, the public masses would also have converted in the fourteenth century.

Nevertheless, I would suggest additional ways in which we can read this particular grave and its inscription. With its ongoing presence next to the shrine of the Sufi saint, it exemplifies a type of sacral cohabitation that is extremely important to understand. In fact, the tales of mass conversion in Sind and Punjab often included this additional layer of understanding spatial coexistence.

Take, for example, this case from the hagiography of Chishti Sufis *Siyar al-Aqtāb*, compiled in 1646 by Shaykh Alhadiya al-Chishti Usmani, concerning the life of one of the central Sufis of this region, Khawaja Fariuddin Shahr Ganj (1175–1265). Khawaja Fariuddin Shahr Ganj spent a great deal of time in Uch Sharif. The event described takes place upstream the Sutluj River from Ajodhan, Punjab (now Pakpattan):

It is narrated that when Baba Farid reached Ajodhan, he rested and meditated under a tree along with his companions. One day he caught sight of a woman with a jug of milk on her head walking by. He asked, 'O Mother, what is in that jug and where do you take it?' When she heard him, she came to him and spoke, 'O friend of God, there is a Yogi who has the people of this village under his magic spell and demands milk from everyone every day. If anyone fails to deliver, then his cow falls ill and dies, and all the milk turns to blood. Do not delay me, or this calamity will be mine' The Shaykh consoled the woman and said, 'Sit and let these ascetics (*fakir*) drink from your jug.' She sat and complied. Shortly after, a disciple of the Yogi walked by and seeing the woman sitting with the Sufis, began to curse at her. The Shaykh said, 'Silence, O fool!

⁹ Wajid Bukhari. Conversation with author. Notes held. Uch Sharif, 11 March 2011.

¹⁰ Gauri, *Uch Sharif*: 111.

¹¹ To gain a sense of these many accounts, see Digby, 'Anecdotes of a Provincial Sufi of the Delhi Sultanate': 99–109.

Sit quietly!’ And his tongue was stricken and his feet were tied. At last that magician Yogi himself appeared and when he saw that his disciple was bound, he grew enraged, and tried to counter the Shaykh with his magic. However, as soon as he tried to utter the spell, he forgot it. Then he understood that in front of a mountain and a river, the stone and the droplet have no agency and no will. Bereft, he begged for mercy for his disciple. The Shaykh replied, ‘I will release your disciple on the condition that you gather all your disciples and all of your possessions and vacate this town, taking your heresy (*kufir*) and your cruelty (*zalalat*) along with you.’ Then, the Shaykh left the tree and went to his house, declaring that only an ascetic can live in the house of the ascetic. The sufferers, relieved of their tyranny, embraced Islam.¹²

This particular account contains within it a number of motifs that prevail in most accounts of conversion via Sufi–Yogi encounters. Some key ideas are that the Sufi is the means to alleviate the suffering of the community at the hands of the Yogi and he does this by engaging in a display of miraculous powers—upending or thwarting the Yogi. However, these encounters result in the conversion of the Yogi himself. In this particular account, Baba Farid explicitly moves into the house (*makan*) of the Yogi and calls attention to the fact that they are both ascetics (*fakir*). This deliberate equation of similarity is significant, as is Farid’s occupation of the Yogi’s house. Such accounts of conversion reflect as much of a topological presence as a historical presence in hagiographical literature—as the leitmotif of conversion provides clear signs of historical and environmental change in South Asia.¹³ While the contemporary inhabitants of Uch Sharif were unable to assert a particular narrative for the Hindu presence, the grave of Rana Rai Tusli Das marked on the sacral geography asserts its own material history, despite the occlusion of continuities in historical pasts.

This visibility of non-Muslim residents—both dead and alive—requires a consistent looking around of the geography of Uch Sharif, as well as the willingness to relooking and reimagining the built environment. It also requires a divergence from the sacral paths that unite the pilgrims who come to Uch Sharif, because in walking along the pilgrimage routes, I saw no evidence of any cremation ground (*shamsan ghat*) for the Hindu community, nor was I able to meet anyone who identified himself as Hindu.

¹² Usmani, *Siyar al-aqtāb*: 167–69.

¹³ See Digby, ‘Before Timur Came’: 298–356.

Yet, only slightly outside of Uch Sharif—in the lowly sanded desert, I came across several ‘graves’ of Hindus (see Figures 4, 5 and 6).¹⁴

Figure 4
A Hindu Grave, Uch Sharif



Source: Author.

¹⁴ The incongruity of Hindu ‘graves’ speaks as much to the memorialisation ethos in the landscape as it does to the inherent impossibility of ritual sites dedicated to an invisible minority population.

Figure 5
A Hindu Grave, Uch Sharif



Source: Author.

As material homes for bodies once belonging to the community, these graves reproduce markers of language and symbols of built architecture, hinting at the continual presence of those effaced from history and memory.

Figure 6
A Hindu Grave, Uch Sharif



Source: Author.

I sought out other markers from this past. At the arch above the old market, I saw the inscription ‘Koncha Mandar Darwaza’—the door towards the temple (see Figure 7). Following the pathway, I asked a number of shopkeepers if they knew where the temple was, but no one had ever

Figure 7
Temple Arch at the Market, Uch Sharif



Source: Author.

heard of a temple. Many were even incredulous that I was asking about a temple. In their Uch Sharif, there were no temples. As the light faded, I spotted, across the horizon, rising above the walled gate, the tell-tale spire of a temple (see Figure 8).

Figure 8
Temple, Uch Sharif



Source: Author.

I knocked on the door and a twelve year old boy answered. This house belonged to his father, who also had a home in Karachi. As the father was at home, I was able to ask him about the arch—and he said that yes, there was a temple inside his home.

♦ *The Medieval History Journal*, 16, 2 (2013): 1–35

In fact, his home was the temple. In the years since the Partition of 1947, scores of Hindu families had left Uch Sharif—driven out by discrimination or by the decommunitisation of Punjab and Sindh itself. The family who lived in the temple had been there since the early 1980s, when the father had annexed the caretaker's house (see Figure 9). He had

Figure 9
Temple, Uch Sharif



Source: Author.

not, however, been able to get legal custody of the temple, and this is why he was not able to tear down the temple and rebuild it. Additionally, there were stories of demons haunting the temple and any attempt to even discuss the demolition of it would result in vehicular accidents, broken businesses and marital discord. Therefore, they left the temple—with its walls sealed, as their silent roommate—with no idol inside.¹⁵ Akin to Baba Farid's moving into the house of the Yogi, this family had made their home in the temple—without tearing it down or covering it up. There was an equivalence here, which had persisted despite the lack of articulation among the inhabitants of Uch Sharif.

The visible–invisible graves, and the visible–invisible temple, represent one stark reality of negotiated difference in Uch Sharif. Those who do not fit the parameters of difference are rendered unseen and their materiality erased from public perception. My assertion to my hosts and friends in Uch Sharif that this city hosted a majority of non-Muslims for its extended history elicits neither disdain nor disbelief. They have no category that identifies Hindus as Pakistani. They are simply unseen and forgotten. This narrative amnesia mimics the historical amnesia that permeates the nationalist historiography of Pakistan, meaning that—following the 'Two Nations Theory'—an explicitly Arab and Sunni past was constructed for its citizens.

This charge of framing a contrarian history of Pakistan, from which Hindus were excluded, except as the villainous others—was initiated under Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1928–1979), but really emerged as state policy during the dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq (1924–1988). In plain terms, the policy seemed to have been to turn Pakistan away from South Asia (India, Bangladesh) and towards West Asia (Saudi Arabia, Egypt). The objective was to create a new teleology for the state of Pakistan, beginning with the Arab merchants of the sixth and seventh centuries who sailed and made settlements in Sind. It continued with the heroism of Muhammad bin Qasim, who planted the standard of Islam on the Indian sub-continent, and then telescoped to the end of the Mughal dynasty (the 1857 uprising) and finally towards the birth of the eleven century long gestating Pakistan.

The goal was to singularly dovetail the history of the nation-state of Pakistan with the history of Islam. The policy strove to project

¹⁵ On the missing idol, see Ahmed, 'Idol in the Archive'.

that the Islamic ideal of an *umma* (community of believers) which, though composed of various *quam* (nations), had no internal religious differentiation. If there were any contradictions, it was the express goal of this constructed history to elide them in young, susceptible minds and create the singular Sunni Muslim Pakistani citizen. This constructed history of the nation was disseminated in official discourses, school textbooks and public commemorations to explain the ancestral and ideological formation of the citizenry. In its ‘museumising imagination’ it created tourist spots along the route taken by Muhammad bin Qasim’s armies in Sind—with bent-metal signposts indicating the foundation of the first mosque and so on.¹⁶

Behind making the Hindu materiality invisible in Uch Sharif is this recent past of state-led effort to mask out difference, drawing deeply on the British colonial practices in Uch Sharif. Therefore, the colonial regime labelled difference as oppositional and reactionary, and the contemporary life in Uch Sharif labels difference as un-seeing. Yet I would suggest that there are other strains to this politics of looking which persist in the material reality of Uch Sharif. It is to uncover a more tangible form of this understanding that we must turn to the medieval text which has hovered, so far, at the edges of our discussion—the early thirteenth century text *Chachnama*. Through this text, we will examine the role the story of Islam’s arrival in Sind played in developing the political realities in the thirteenth century and beyond.

II

In Uch Sharif, the memory of Muhammad bin Qasim’s early eighth century arrival is monumental. There is a mosque of which he is said to have laid the foundation and there is a well that he dug for the inhabitants (see Figure 10). There is the text, *Chachnama*, which was written in Uch Sharif in the early thirteenth-century, which details his history. Both the mosque and the well exist as pilgrimage sites, washed in white limestone water and adorned with flowers and plaques. It is inside this well that Baba Farid is said to have spent 40 days in meditation while suspended by his feet. Baba Farid’s ascetic practice of suspension—the *sīrṣcāsana*—is part of

¹⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*: 178; Jalal, ‘Conjuring Pakistan: History as Official Imaging’: 73–89.

Figure 10
Baba Farid's Well, Uch Sharif



Source: Author.

the Hathayoga and Vaishnavite yogic practices.¹⁷ In soliciting the account of Baba Farid's ascetic practice in Uch Sharif, I was repeatedly told that a Hindu merchant from the town fed the Sufi Shaykh during his meditation, and, when Baba Farid emerged from the well, he blessed the merchant and accepted him as a disciple. It is for this reason, it was explained, that

¹⁷ See Mallinson, *The Khecarīvidyā of Ādinātha*. For a depiction of the practice by a Sufi, see illustrated manuscript of Jami's (1604), held at Museo Lázaro Galdiano, <http://goo.gl/aLtiDt>.

Hindus continue to venerate Baba Farid and visit his shrine in Pakpattān. I visited the well to see for myself how precisely the history of Islam's arrival is tied to Uch Sharif's material landscape.

On the wall above the well, a green sign informs the reader about the particular history of this location. In translation the unattributed sign reads:

There came a famous man from Arabia. He was seventeen years of age at that time. He defeated Raja Dahir and conquered Deebal. After conquering Sindh, he departed to Uch. The young man came from Arabia; his name was Muhammad Bin Qasim. He conquered Sindh and reached Uch. He built a mosque and dug up a well in Uch. The name of this masjid is 'Hajat Masjid'. This ancient Masjid is the worship place of four friends. This is kindness and mercy of M.B. Qasim. This is not false but a true story. The water of this well is likewise 'Aab-i Hayat' because the saints meditated and prayed here. A gloomy fellow who drinks water from this well gets rid of sadness.

In its invocation of Muhammad bin Qasim's presence in Uch Sharif, the plaque relies upon a series of material memories: the tree which he planted, the mosque which he built, the fort which he conquered and his soldiers who settled here and created genealogies of tribes.

The principle account, in Persian, of Muhammad bin Qasim's invasion of Sind in the early eighth century was written in Uch Sharif in 1216 by another recent émigré—'Ali Kufi. It was written as an explicit history of Islam's arrival to Sind and dedicated to Sultan Qabacha's chief minister 'Ain al-Mulk-Abu Bakr al-Ash'ari. Although it became known to the world as *Chachnama*, the book was originally titled 'The Book of Stories of the King Dahir bin Chach bin Sila'ij and his Death at the Hands of Muhammad bin Qasim' (*Kitāb-i Hikayāt-i Rai Dāhir bin Chach bin Sila'ij wa halāk shudan ou badāst-i Muhammad-i Qasim*). *Chachnama* begins in the city of al-Aror, the capital fort of Sind in the seventh century, and discusses the rise to power of a young and talented Brahmin Chach bin Sila'ij. It goes on to describe the condition at al-Aror prior to Chach's arrival at the capital, his employment as a scribe for the King's chief minister, how the young queen falls in love with him and schemes to place him upon the throne of the kingdom after the death of the King, Chach's reconquest of 'the four quarters' of the kingdom, his treatment of civilians and cities, the tussle between Chach's two sons Dahir and Dahirsena for the throne after Chach's death, the treacherous way in which Dahir takes

over al-Arur and finally the setpiece—the marriage of Dahir to his own sister. All of this, constituting the first third of the *Chachnama*, has three overarching themes: the basis of legitimacy for the ruler, the good council of the advisor and the immorality of treachery. The second part of the text is introduced under the heading ‘A History from the Righteously Guided Caliphs to al-Walid’; Ali Kufi narrates the campaign of Muhammad bin Qasim towards al-Hind and al-Sind with a focus on the inner turmoil, deliberations, doubts and planning in the Muslim forces. Also described are private conversations between commanders, dreams in which the Prophet comes as hope to the weary, over forty epistles between the young commander and his governor, conversations and agreements with local rajas of Hindustan, appointments of non-Muslims to administrative and ceremonial positions, discourses with astrologers and mendicants—all interspersed in the methodical military march of Muhammad bin Qasim through the kingdom of Dahir. Most importantly, from the conquests of Daybul to Multan, Muhammad bin Qasim’s campaign is a deliberate mirroring of the campaigns that Chach undertakes in the ‘four quarters’ of his kingdom—al-Qasim even plants a Muslim standard at the very spot where decades before, ‘Ali Kufi has Chach marking with a tree the extent of his kingdom. ‘Ali Kufi’s Muslim kingdom of faith, hence, explicitly restrains itself under the previous political boundary.

The world of the early thirteenth century within which *Chachnama* took place was politically heterodox and increasingly unstable. There were multiple claimants for the city of Uch Sharif and the ruler, Qabacha, needed to make alliances with the neighbouring principalities in Gujarat to fend off the challenge from Lahore. The political imagination deployed in the *Chachnama* needed to re-imagine Islam’s moment of origin in Sind to argue for a future utopia.

The first attempt to delineate a political theology of difference and power is narrated by ‘Ali Kufi in the section pertaining to Sind before the arrival of Islam—during the reign of Chach. The Brahmin Chach is attempting to conquer the various principalities in Sind and unite them under his rule. He faces resistance at the fort-city of Brahmanabad and lays siege to it. Eventually, the siege is broken and Brahmanabad is taken, but Chach faces an antagonistic population who is largely Buddhist and who pays tribute to the central Buddhist temple. Chach suspects that this Buddhist priest was responsible for the resistance of the people, and vows to ‘peel off the skin’ of the priest and ‘give it to the Royal drummers so

that they can stretch it across their drums and beat it to shreds' (*o ditan-ra budham ta dar tabalha kushand o mi zanand ta para para shavad*).¹⁸ After settling the affairs of the new state, Chach turns his attention to the priest who had defied him:

Then asked, 'Where is that magician Buddhist (*samani*) so that I can see him?' They said, 'He is an ascetic (*nāsik*) and will be with the ascetics. He is one of the wise ones of al-Hind and a servant of the temple (*Kanohār*)—they praise his miracles and his spiritual gain. He is so powerful that he has ensnared the whole world in his spell and those that he supplants, succeed.'¹⁹

Even though Chach had gained political control over Brahmanabad, he still felt that he needed to counter the powerful claims of this Buddhist priest. He takes a large retinue and sets off to find and kill the Buddhist. He orders them to stop at a distance from the temple, and tells them that he will now proceed alone. He explains that when he is done conversing with the priest, he will give them a signal and at that moment, they are to descend upon the priest and kill him. As Chach approaches the priest, he observes him sitting alone on the ground, making little clay idols (*asnām*) with his hands and then marking them with a seal. Chach stands in front of the priest, who continues to work and to pay no attention to Chach. After a while, he addresses Chach, 'So the son of Sila'ij the priest has arrived?' Chach replies, 'Yes, O ascetic Buddhist.' 'Why have you come?' 'I am your disciple and I have come to pay my respects.'²⁰

The priest asks Chach to sit down and inquires about him. Chach tells him that he wants the priest to return to Brahmanabad and take over the important religious duties so that the people would be able to continue their traditional ways. The priest replies that he has no need to take part in political matters and he is content to stay in his temple. The following conversation ensued:

Chach asked, 'So why did you resist me in taking Brahmanabad?' The priest replied, When the ruler Agham had passed away and the young prince became the Raja, I reluctantly took the task of giving him advice. Though in my view, all matters of this world are matters to be shunned. Now that you are the

¹⁸ Baloch, *Fathnama-i Sind 'urf Chachnama*: 30.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*: 31.

²⁰ *Ibid.*: 32.

ruler of the world, I am willing to obey you, but I fear that you will take your revenge on the temple and destroy it'. Chach answered, 'It is always better to be praising the Buddha and to attain perfection in his path. If you need anything from me, you simply ask'.²¹

Chach continues to offer the priest riches and he declines each time. In the end, he makes one request: 'The Buddhist temple of Kanohār is ancient and decrepit. If you repair it, you will earn the gratitude of the believers.' Chach quickly agrees and leaves the priest. He returns to his troops and orders them back to Brahmanabad.

'Why did you not let us kill the priest?' Chach's minister inquires of him. He replies:

I saw something that was no trickery nor magic (*hargiz dar vai sahār o sh'baida nist*). I examined it carefully with my eyes. When I sat down next to him, I saw a demon, ugly and fearful (*makruh o sahamnak*) who stood next to him. His eyes glowed like embers glowing or rubies; his lips fat and drooping; his teeth sharp like spears. And he looked to strike someone. I was frightened when I saw him and I dared not speak to the priest as I had indicated to you, because I knew he would kill me. So I made peace with him and left.²²

In setting up this conflict amongst two religions—Brahmin and Buddhist—*Chachnama* specifies a hierarchical distinction between the ruler and the ruled. It asserts that ways of sacrality, though overlapping, have contentious claims to political power. The stand-off between the political power of the ruler, as represented by Chach, and the sacral power of the Buddhist, as represented by the demon with ruby eyes, rests on a specific idea of religious difference. The demon's capacity to incite fear in Chach rests on Chach's understanding of the Buddhist priest's spiritual power, which is linked to his political power as well. Hence, the realms of the political and the spiritual, although overlapping, are distinct. Chach affirms this in his discussion with the priest when he proclaims that his intention is to seek the higher truth in life through service. Thus, for Chach, the reason for compromise was both an understanding of religious efficacy in political life, as well as a grasp of vortices of power. In recognising

²¹ *Ibid.*: 33.

²² *Ibid.*: 34.

and fearing the Buddhist demon, the Brahmin Chach agrees to a political détente. In recognising the political power of Chach and asking him for material aid, the Buddhist priest also agrees to a political détente. Within the imagination of the *Chachnama*, this account is, thus, an explicit argument for accepting religious difference as mutually comprehensible yet incommensurate.

After establishing this basic understanding of religious difference, *Chachnama* brings Muhammad bin Qasim and Islam into the equation. There are numerous examples in the text where Muhammad bin Qasim makes political and personal decisions (alliances, appointments and legalities) that demonstrate his equation of Hindu subjects as political allies. I want to focus, however, on two specific instances.

The first instance occurs when Muhammad bin Qasim is attempting to take the fort of al-Arur and faces staunch resistance from the people. After a siege, the people decide to lay down their arms when Muhammad bin Qasim promises their safety, and open the gates to the fort. It is stated in *Chachnama*:

Then, as Muhammad bin Qasim entered the fort, he heard that all the inhabitants were gathered at the temple of *Naubahar* and praying. Muhammad bin Qasim asks, 'Whose home is this that everyone is attending it and praying here?' They replied, 'This is the temple *Naubahar*.' Then he entered it and saw a figure (*surati*) sitting on a horse. In the figure's hands were bracelets of gold and rubies. Muhammad bin Qasim reached out and with his hand took off the bracelet from the idol (*sanam*). Then he called the caretaker priest and said, 'Is this your idol?' He replied, 'Yes. But he had two bracelets and now has only one.' Muhammad bin Qasim said, 'Why does your god not know that his bracelet is gone?' The priest bowed his head (*sar dar pish andakht*) and Muhammad bin Qasim smiled and returned the bracelet.²³

This episode establishes both the foreignness of the idol to the Muslim political power and its apparent amusement at the powerlessness of the idol. The smile here is key to recognising that the idol is not a source of anxiety, as it was for the Brahmin Chach. Like the encounter between Chach and the Buddhist priest, *Chachnama* offers both a political and a spiritual hierarchy. Unlike that account, here Muhammad bin Qasim demonstrates the superiority of his faith over the other. As a believer,

²³ *Ibid.*: 173.

he is able to assert power over the idol. However, as we can see, this superiority does not result in establishing direct political power. After the encounter, Muhammad bin Qasim orders that all of the soldiers or armed resisters in the fort be put to death. He stipulates that even if they promise never to fight again, they should not be pardoned. *Chachnama* narrates:

Upon hearing this, Ladi (the deposed Queen) proclaimed, ‘The people of this land are builders and traders. This fort lives due to their hard work and their industry. Because of their work, the fields are green and the treasury is full. If you kill them, then your own treasury will suffer’. Muhammad bin Qasim proclaimed, ‘Such is the command of the Queen’ and pardoned them all.

What is remarkable in this account is that the political counsel of the deposed Hindu queen is given as the reason for rethinking a political strategy. Hence, though the account begins with sketching out religious difference as hierarchical and incomprehensible, it ends with both comprehension and mutual dependence. It should be stressed that the invocation of material and societal well-being offered by the Queen as an effective tool in governance is the reason for generosity towards the inhabitants and not the capacity to convert or to submit.

In the second instance, Muhammad bin Qasim has a different emotional response to another idol when he enters the famous Sun temple in Multan. However, the outcome remains the same:

The narrators of traditions and the story-tellers (*raviān*) tell and ‘Ali bin Muhammad Mada’ini records that he heard from Abu Muhammad Hindi that Muhammad bin Qasim entered that temple with his advisors and his nobles. He saw an idol made of gold with two bright ruby eyes, glowing red. Muhammad bin Qasim thought that this was a man. He unsheathed his sword and struck the idol. The Brahmin caretaker exclaimed, ‘Oh just Commander! This is an idol (*būt*) which the Kings of Multan created and under which they sequestered riches and treasures.’ Then Muhammad bin Qasim commanded to have the idol lifted.²⁴

Here, Muhammad bin Qasim is frightened enough to strike the idol—and though this event takes places much later in the chronicle, he is still unable to determine whether the idol is or is not a human being.

²⁴ *Ibid.*: 184.

The invocation of the ruby eyes, both here and in the earlier instance of the frightening demon of Chach, now prompts the *Chachnama* reader to explicitly consider the status of non-Muslims in relation to the Muslim political power. The political importance is that after each of these encounters, Muhammad bin Qasim commits to ensuring the safety of the inhabitants. If there was a détente between spiritual and political power within the Buddhist–Brahmin, then there was an accommodation based on effective role of the population between the Muslim–Brahmin. However, there is a greater theoretical importance behind these encounters—that the demon with the red eyes puts into textual conversation the creedal and political powers inhabiting the region at the time. That this conversation invents historical precedent for the sake of political stability is not the most radical occurrence. The most radical occurrence is that the conversation happens at all. In the imagination of the *Chachnama*, religious difference did not exist to be erased, nor did it exist as an instrument of application of power. I have argued elsewhere that the *Chachnama* exists as a particularly imagined utopic vision of the possible futures on the frontier of Islam.²⁵

In the *Chachnama*, written in Uch Sharif, this invocation of mutually comprehensible incommensurability encompasses five hundred years of Muslim presence in the region—it has already digested the unknowable treaties, pilgrimage routes, merchant networks, artisan borrowings and heterodox courtly culture that represents the various ‘Abbasid and Fatimid principalities from 750 CE to 1230 CE. As we look and trace the medieval articulation of religious difference in *Chachnama*, I want to look around at the historiography of Uch Sharif between the thirteenth and the nineteenth-century to see how this particular meaning continued to exist alongside other understandings of religious difference, even if the political programme undergirding *Chachnama* became a lost future.

Shortly after the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, we have a testimony from the Moroccan jurist Ibn Battuta (1304–1377), who narrates his visit to Sind and to Uch Sharif, circa 1341, in his travelogue *Tuhfat al-Nuzzar fi ghar’ aib al-amsar wa-’ajaib al-asfar* (A Gift for Those Who Wish to See Wonders of Cities and Miracles of Travels), more commonly known as *Rihla* (Travels). He describes Uch Sharif as ‘a large and well built town which lies on the bank of the river of Sind and has fine bazaars and good buildings’.²⁶ Ibn Battuta’s account helps us localise religious

²⁵ See Ahmed, ‘The Long Thirteenth Century of the *Chachnama*’: 459–91.

²⁶ Gibb, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*: 620.

difference in Uch Sharif during the fourteenth-century. His account of Hindu women committing themselves to fire is as follows:

I saw people hurrying out from our camp, and some of our party along with them. I asked them what was happening and they told me that one of the Hindu infidel (*kafir*) had died, and that a fire had been kindled to burn him, and his wife would burn along with him. After the burning, my companions came back and told me that she had embraced the dead man until she herself was burned with him. Later on I used often to see that in that country (*mulk*) an infidel Hindu woman, richly dressed, riding on horseback, followed by both Muslims and infidels and preceded by drums and trumpets; she was accompanied by Brahmans, who are the chiefs of Hindus. In the Sultan's dominions they ask his permission to burn her, which he accords them and then they burn her. [...] The burning of the wife after her husband's death is regarded by them as a commendable act, but is not compulsory; but when a widow burns herself, her family acquire a certain prestige by it and gain a reputation for fidelity.²⁷

In Ibn Batutta's testimony, the sanction from legal and royal Muslim authority is apparent, and indeed at the level of cultural practice even the Muslim inhabitants of Uch Sharif participate in the practice. The level of recognition of difference extends even into the text itself: while Ibn Batutta views the practice with distaste, he does not advocate eradicating it, nor does he make a case for conversion of the non-Muslim population. Here, in keeping with the *Chachnama*, the difference is perceived as comprehensible, yet incommensurate with Muslim faith.

However, such a narrative of mutual coexistence coupled with an awareness of difference dwindled from the eighteenth-century British colonial intervention in Sind and decisively re-emerged very differently in the nineteenth-century.

III

One of the earliest British colonial accounts of Sind was written by Alexander Hamilton (d. circa 1733). In 1699, Hamilton sailed upstream from the Indus River and found a land overrun with 'villains' who 'struck a Terror on all that had Commerce at Tatta'.²⁸ In his account, Hamilton notes that though the official religion in Sind is Islam, there are 'ten

²⁷ *Ibid.*: 614–15.

²⁸ Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies*: 115.

Gentows or Pagans for one Mussulman' and that the Muslims 'have full Toleration for [Hindu] Religion, and keep their Fast and Feasts as in former Times, when the Sovereignty was in Pagan Princes Hands. They burn their Dead, but the Wives are restrained from burning with the Corps of their Husbands'.²⁹ For Hamilton, the coexistence of Hindus and Muslims (despite the numerical strength of the Hindus) perhaps matched his observations from the port cities of Kerala and Gujarat. More notable for us, however, is the political space that made mutually recognised difference an act of civic coexistence.

I am beginning with Hamilton's account as it matches the descriptions from Persian chronicles produced in Thatta and Bhakkar in the early eighteenth-century accounts, such as Mufzal Khan's *Tar'ikh-i Mufazali* (1712), and 'Ali Sher Qanā's *Tuhfat al-Kirām* (1767). In *Tuhfat al-Kirām*, the accounts of various towns in Sind (Uch Sharif, Bhakkar, Multan and others) largely focus on biographical details of prominent Muslims, but also mention large populations of non-Muslims, along with their customs, as cohabiting the region. It provides a historical genealogy for this mutual coexistence by narrating the arrival of Islam to Sind in the eighth-century under the command of Muhammad bin Qasim. This history was taken from the *Chachnama*, but amended in unique ways. Hence, *Tuhfat al-Kirām* notes that after his conquest of the capital-fort of Brahmanabad in Sind, he received an audience:

It is narrated that one day Muhammad bin Qasim was sitting when a group of a thousand Brahmin with their heads and faces shaved entered the army camp. When asked why, they declared that according to their custom they are in mourning for the loss of their ruler. Muhammad bin Qasim consulted with the queen Ladi (wife of the deposed Raja) on the ancient customs of this land, and declared that the taxation from these districts would be collected by the Brahmin caste. When at ease, they begged,

We are a nation (*qaūm*) of idol worshippers. Our sustenance is tied only to the income derived from service at the temple. As we are now your subjects, and subject to your tax (*jizyā*) we need permission to make new temples where we can praise the sovereignty of the Caliph.

Muhammad bin Qasim, after consulting with Hajjaj bin Yusuf and the Caliph, gave them the permission to continue their ancient customary practices.³⁰

²⁹ *Ibid.*: 128.

³⁰ Tattavi, *Tuhfat ul- Kiram*: 58–60. All translations from Persian, Urdu and Arabic are mine, unless noted.

Set at the outset of the work, this particular account reflects the by then well-established sensibility in Persian chronicles of Sind—as well in the folk and oral narratives—that the Muslim and non-Muslim pasts in Sind were intertwined from their very inception in the eighth century. In this account, the new Muslim ruler is confronted with a mass public (the number of Brahmin is explicitly denoted) and a series of customary practices which need legal and royal sanction. In invoking permission from the Caliph, *Tuhfat al-Kirām* notes that the presence of temples in Sind is not outside of Muslim history. In making the claim for why temples continued to exist, Hindus continued to work and live there, and lives continued to intertwine, *Tuhfat al-Kirām*, grounded everyday practice in the history of its place. However, in contrast to the *Chachnama*, the *Tuhfat al-Kirām* does not mention the deposed Queen Ladi. Still, Alexander Hamilton's observation that a majority of the Hindu population seemed to coexist with a Muslim minority is given historical depth by *Tuhfat al-Kirām*.

The most influential translation—and history—of Indian pasts written in the eighteenth century is Alexander Dow's *A History of Hindostan* (1768), a translation of Muhammad Qasim Firishta's *Gulsham-i Ibrāhīmī/Tar'ikh* (1606). Dow categorically asserts a politics of invisibility towards the Hindu subjects in Mughal India—notice that he dismisses the translation of the *Mahabharata* as 'a performance of fancy':

The prejudices of the Mahomedans against the followers of the Brahmin religion, seldom permit them to speak with common candour of the Hindoos. It swayed very much with Ferishta when he affirmed, that there is no history among the Hindoos of better authority than the Mahabarit. That work is a poem and not a history: It was translated into Persian by the brother of the great Abul Fazil, rather as a performance of fancy, than as an authentic account of the ancient dynasties of the Kings of India. [...] The Mahomedans know nothing of the Hindoo learning: and had they even any knowledge of the history of the followers of Brimha, their prejudices in favour of the jewish fictions contained in the Koran, would make them reject accounts, which tend to subvert the system of their own faith.³¹

For Dow, the Muslim indifference to the Hindu past meant the Muslim intolerance for the Hindu present. Dow's *History* became one of the most celebrated volumes on Indic history in Europe—translated into French and German editions that were published in 1769 and 1773. His

³¹ Dow, *The History of Hindostan*: vi–vii.

description of India as a land divided between an indolent ruling elite and a suppressed and feminised population was cited by both Hegel and Voltaire (and later Marx).

It also became the theoretical framework for how religious difference was written into India by the East India Company in the nineteenth-century. The crucial example is James Mill's 1817 *History of British India*, which drew upon Dow to argue for a tripartite division of Indian pasts and anchored the arrival of Islam as a fundamental rupture in the history. Mill posited a golden age of Ancient Hindu India, which was interrupted and arrested by the dark age of medieval Muslim rule and followed by the enlightened, civilised, liberated rule of the British. Thus, the British fabricated and mobilised a narrative of divisiveness within pre-colonial India that would pave the way, ideologically, for their own entry.

This conception of religious difference was rendered into and became foundational for the East India Company's knowledge-gathering and its territorial acquisition policies. The principality of Sind, which was annexed in 1843, and for which a decisive battle was fought in Uch Sharif, was built upon layers of such narratives of difference and conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims and packaged at the end with an emancipatory message, in which the British were putative liberators.

Alexander Hamilton was followed by Captain James McMurdo (1785–1820), a political agent who in the early decades of the nineteenth-century surveyed Sind and Uch to report on the feasibility of an invasion by the East India Company of the Sind principality. It is in McMurdo that we find the earliest account of a schism between Hindus and Muslims with the hope that the vanquished Hindus would act as natural allies for the British. The religious difference introduced by McMurdo in his description has both racial and political features. He describes the Hindus as racially similar to 'their brethren who inhabit the towns in the western coast of India.'³² He portrays the Muslims as 'the most bigoted, the most self-sufficient, and the most ignorant people on record'.³³ These bigoted Muslims, McMurdo asserts, have so long dominated the Hindus so as to change their very character:

How different is the picture which Sindh presents! In the course of a thousand years there is not an instance of a Hindu having attempted to rescue himself

³² McMurdo, 'An Account of the Country of Sindh': 243.

³³ *Ibid.*: 244.

or fellow-countrymen from a state of vilest slavery; nor, since the fall of the Hindu dynasty, has any aboriginal native of the province raised himself to independence. [...] The original Hindu tribes who were lords of the soil are all now ranged under the faith of Muhammed, or have become assimilated to his followers.³⁴

The Muslim rulers of Sind, McMurdo believed, had ‘treachery as a national vice’ and no zeal greater than ‘propagating the faith.’ According to McMurdo, it was the duty of the British to force the Muslims to flee from the land. His emancipatory programme was echoed in a series of writings which emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century, including M. Elphinstone’s *History of India* (1841), H. M. Elliot’s *History of India* (1867) and Vincent A. Smith’s *Early History of India* (1901).

Although McMurdo died of cholera, his posthumous papers were published in 1834 alongside another young political agent Thomas Postans (1808–1846), who continued working on the task of inscribing the difference between the Hindus and Muslims of Sind:

Sindh [...] under its Hindu possessors was a rich, flourishing, and extensive monarchy, but that, subsequently becoming the prey of conquerors, who, paid no attention to the improvement of the country or maintenance of the imperial authority, this valuable territory dwindled at length into waste... All the peculiarities and unsullied pride of caste, which distinguishes the Hindu under his own or British government, has been completely lost in Sindh. In India we have seen the dormant spirit of an injured people rousing itself to retributive vengeance, flinging off the yoke of Islam, regaining their monarchies, and making the bigoted Moslem tremble at the Pagan’s power; but in Sindh oppression has rooted out all patriotism, and the broken spirited Hindu becomes a helpless servant to his Moslem tyrant, and willing inducer of his own extreme degradation.³⁵

Postans committed himself to researching the Muslim past in Sind and was one of the first to translate extracts from the *Chachnama*—only the same sections which were used by *Tuhfat al-Kirām*. Postans used extracts from *Chachnama* to give historical depth to the incendiary charges laid by McMurdo. The portrait of Muhammad bin Qasim that emerged in Postans focuses specifically on his habit of ‘converting the Pagan temples

³⁴ *Ibid.*: 251.

³⁵ Postans, *Personal Observations on Scinde*: 158–60.

into mosques and places of Mohammedan prayer'. His destruction of the temple at Daybul 'occasioned a general despondency throughout the country'.³⁶ Postans' reading of *Chachnama* showed that when the Muslims conquered Sind 'mosques were erected on the ruins of the temples, or those places were transformed for purposes of Mohammedan worship'.³⁷ For Postans, every act of Muslim construction is always, by definition, an act of destroying the 'pagan' culture from previous times.

Postans was followed by another young political agent Richard F. Burton (1821–1892), who was the personal attaché of Charles Napier, the British general who annexed Sind in 1843. In Burton's writing, as in Postans' and McMurdo's, Sind was a paradise before the Muslim invasion:

It is related by the chronicles of antiquity, that in days gone by, and ages that have long fled, Scinde was a most lovely land situated in a delightful climate, with large, flourishing, and populous cities; orchards producing every kind of tree and fruit. It was governed by a powerful monarch who had mighty horses and impregnable forts, whose counsellors were renowned for craft, and whose commanders celebrated for conduct. And the boundaries of his dominions and provinces extended as far as Kanoj and Cashmere, upon whose south-western frontier one of the Rahis planted two towering cypresses. During the caliphate of the Chief of True Believers, Umar son of Khattab, it was resolved, with the permission of Allah, to subject the sinners of Scinde to the scimitar of certain sturdy saints militant.³⁸

Burton's ideologically motivated rewriting of Muslim history went further, emphasising in tremendous detail the wartime atrocities allegedly committed by Muslims against Hindus. In particular, Burton used Postans' translation of the *Chachnama* to give an account of the fall of the city of Debal to the Arab armies, and to denote how Muslims dealt with the Hindus:

Thus was Dewal lost and won. For three days there was a general massacre of the inhabitants. The victors then brought out the Moslem prisoners, and captured immense property and treasures. Before throwing down the pagoda, and substituting the mosque and the minaret in its stead, Mahommed bin Kasim,

³⁶ *Ibid.*: 149.

³⁷ *Ibid.*: 151.

³⁸ Burton, *Scinde*: 125.

ordering the attendance of the Brahmans, entered the temple and bade them show him the deity they adored. A well-formed figure of a man on horseback being pointed out to him, he drew his sabre to strike it, when one of the priests cried, 'it is an idol and not a living being!' Then advancing towards the statue, the Moslem removed his mailed gauntlet, and placing it upon the hand of the image, said to the by-standers, 'See, this idol hath but one glove, ask him what he hath done with the other?' They replied, 'What should a stone know of these things?'

Whereupon Mahommed bin Kasim, rebuking them, rejoined, 'verily, yours is a curious object of worship, who knows nothing, even about himself'. He then directed that the Brahmans, to distinguish them from other Hindoos, should carry in their hands a small vessel of grain, as mendicants, and should beg from door to door every morning; after which he established a governor at Dewal, and, having satisfactorily arranged affairs in that quarter, embarked his machines of war in boats, sent them up the river to Nirunkot, and proceeded with his army by land in the same direction.³⁹

Pegged against the violence of the fall of Daybul (for three days there was a general massacre of the inhabitants) there is the curious episode of flesh meeting stone—the difference that Burton points out is of knowledge itself constituted between Hindus and Muslims. In Burton's rendering Muhammad bin Qasim's encounter with the idol has no equivalence—there is no understanding and the result is rather a particular policy of discrimination. Burton is thus able to assert a long history of difference articulated in Sind as illustrating the need for colonial intervention. This is the most important turn in the history of these narratives—that these reframings of Uch Sharif's history by the colonial agents McMurdo, Postans and Burton were put to specific political usage by the East India Company.

Charles Napier (1782–1853) was put in charge of the Sind campaign by the Governor-General of the East India Company, Lord Edward Law Ellenborough (1790–1871). Ellenborough was eager to take over the commercial concerns of the Indus delta and was unhappy with the lack of control exerted by the rulers of Mir over the activities of pirates and rogue traders (that is, American and French vessels) on these channels. Napier, a veteran military commander of imperial wars in Europe and self-described victim of fool-hardy politicians, had arrived in India convinced that the Company had lost its moorings there—becoming beholden to commerce

³⁹ *Ibid.*: 131–34.

and shying away from its Godly mission. A deeply religious man, Napier saw the liberation of Sind from its despotic Muslim rulers, his Christian duty, with the added benefit that it would demonstrate his brilliance as a tactical commander:

I made up my mind that although war had not been declared (nor is it necessary to declare it), I would at once march upon Imangurh and prove to the whole Talpur family of both Khyrpor and Hyderabad that neither their deserts, nor their negotiations can protect them from the British troops. The Ameers will fly over the Indus, and we shall become masters of the left bank of the river from Mitenkote to the mouth; peace with civilization will then replace war and barbarism. My conscience will be light, for I see no wrong in so regulating a set of tyrants who are themselves invaders, and have in sixty years nearly destroyed the country. The people hate them.⁴⁰

Napier, convinced by the reports of his political agents (including Burton) declared that the Muslim rulers of Sind were the ‘greatest ruffians’, ‘imbeciles’, possessing ‘*zenanas* filled with young girls torn from their friends, and treated when in the hareem with revolting barbarity’, and even prone to enjoying the occasional human ‘sacrifice’.⁴¹ What begins as a testament to ‘toleration’ in Alexander Dow’s account in 1699 ends as a cry to stop ‘human sacrifice’ by Charles Napier in 1843. Over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century, the British colonial regime produced a very different idea of religious difference, and created a textual historical past for it by systematically corrupting previous historical texts.

The racial, ethnographic and textual dimensions of the religious difference created in colonial texts and in colonial practice—situated in Uch Sharif—attempted to annihilate other imaginings of difference in Uch Sharif. In large ways, we can call the colonial intervention a success—after all, the notion that Hindus and Muslims were ‘two nations’ emerged as the *prima facie* reason for the partition of South Asia in 1947. However, though political power accepted, in a large manner, the colonial initiation of difference, the evidence from Uch Sharif suggests that it was never able to annihilate the other ways of being. The graves of Hindus, the temple that serves as a house and the hagiographies of saints, such as of Baba Farid, all contain within their material and textual structures the pre-colonial

⁴⁰ Napier, *The Life and Opinions of General Sir Charles James Napier*: 275.

⁴¹ See Napier, *The Conquest of Scinde*.

understanding of mutually comprehensible difference. The presence of these structures and the invocation of these stories in contemporary Uch Sharif is both a sign of the dominance of the colonial narrative of religious difference and its failure—because while the inhabitants could not direct the historian to a temple, they showed him how they could live in one.

Recognising the presence of difference, invisible at first sight, and made visible by looking again, goes against the grain of the liberalism and its assimilationist archive of thought. The radical heterogeneity evidenced in pasts, articulated in space, must be incorporated into our contemporary understanding of difference. However, the need to relook at these pasts itself cannot be the end of a recuperative gesture. We cannot assert difference as having existed once in the past and now lost through colonial or post-colonial rupture. Though this essay spent less time than it could on the present inhabitants of the temple in Uch Sharif, I want to stress that behind their co-existence is neither lack of understanding of difference nor lack of ways to tackle it. There is a social and collective will which is just as incisive towards difference as the medieval one I have articulated above.

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